

# THE AWAKENING

**After Kate Chopin's 1899 Novel**



## Notes on the Author:

Kate Chopin (1851–1904) was an American author of short stories and novels based in Louisiana. She is now seen as a forerunner of American 20th-century feminist authors. Her 1899 novel, *The Awakening*, received criticism because it gave life to the protagonist, Edna Pontillier, who's sexual desires and questioning around the sanctity of motherhood was seen as deeply threatening.

## Synopsis:

*"The voice of the sea is seductive; never ceasing, whispering, clamoring, murmuring, inviting the soul to wander for a spell in abysses of solitude; to lose itself in mazes of inward contemplation."*

Written in the late 1800s, Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* follows the journey of Edna Pontellier, a woman who finds herself on the brink of self-actualisation. In the story, Edna - who is married and has children - is beginning to feel the tug of an illicit identity: a self that desires, a self that longs for solitude, a self that is shaped by the music that drifts from the piano and her awakened lust on this magical moon soaked evening.

## Note from the producers:

*After reading the book Phoebe McIndoe and Marta Medvesek started to have long evenings of discussions around motherhood, marriage and identity. The book got under their skin - as good books often do - they found themselves continually coming back to its key ideas and scenes. Slowly, it felt like these ideas and scenes were beginning to trace and thread and overlap into their everyday lives...*

This piece is a culmination of that dreaming, thinking and awakening.

In this short feature you'll hear the following voices.

## Voices:

Voice 1: Phoebe McIndoe

Voice 2: Eirian Bonham Carter

Voice 3: Marta Medvesek

Voice 4: Caitlin Schiller

Voice 5: Sofia Beverley Turnham

Voice 6: Hana Medvesek

Voice 7: Toma Medvesek Ujakovic

## SCENE I

**[Sound of the recorder moving and a book being placed on the table]**

**Voice 1:** Here is my copy of the book,

**Voice 2 & 1 overlayed:** *The Awakening*, by Kate Chopin.

**[A journal entry recorded]**

**Voice 1:** It's amazing how sometimes a line in a book can jog you along a whole track of memory...or an entirely new future-pathway, one that you never imagined for yourself.

**Voice 1: [reads from *The Awakening*]:**

*"The water of the Gulf stretched out before her,*

*gleaming with a million lights of the sun.*

*The voice of the sea is seductive, never ceasing..."*

**Voice 3: [repeating]** The voice of the sea is seductive,  
never ceasing...

**Voice 1:** *"Whispering, clamoring, murmuring,*

*Inviting the soul to wander for a spell in abysses of solitude."*

## SCENE II

**Voice 4: [Interviewee describes *The Awakening's* central character, Edna]**

...And then there's some description of like she is pregnant every two years, and I was like oh my God.

The idea of creating life inside your own body... every two years...

for like eight years...?! It's...a nightmare.

**Voice 1: [reflecting on the central character, Edna]** And she starts...

**Voice 2:** To question?

**Voice 1:** Yeah.

**Voice 1:** And...It's, he...the husband...thinks she's going crazy

because she starts kind of neglecting her duties as a mother and she starts

following her own interests.

Like, she starts painting, and he thinks it's ridiculous -

to the point where he even goes to the doctor and says,

"my wife is losing her mind",

even though, in her eyes, it's the first time that she's truly finding her own identity.

**Voice 4: [pauses and repeats an unspoken question]**

"*What did I mean by that?*", Well, she's not quite like what the ideal of a woman is.

Edna is a "a different woman", who is handsome, who has artistic leanings, who doesn't

necessarily even want the children she has. But *that* is her option.

**[Voice 1 & 2 discuss marriage]**

**Voice 1:** Was it something that you were just kind of expected to do?

**Voice 2:** It was definitely seen as... running the home, looking after the children... And

running the home included, doing the meals...

**Voice 1:** What made you want to get married?

**Voice 2: [Pauses]**

I wanted to have children.

### **SCENE III**

**Voice 4:** This is the story of an American woman named Edna, who, one summer holiday is introduced (through music and a burgeoning love affair) to *a way* that her life *could* be. A 'way' that she always suspected it could be, but never before embraced. And her subsequent attempt to live 'this life' and her disappointment that 'this life' is not yet available to her because of what society is...

**Voice 1: [recording journal entry]** So I've been reading *The Awakening* for a couple of weeks...

And I feel like the words are slowly starting to spring up from the pages and coil around parts of my life... and tease their way into the thoughts that I've been having...

Especially around children and the sense of identity and wanting to keep your own sense of identity, but also having kids.

**[Voice 1 and Voice 4 in conversation]**

**Voice 1:** Do you think she understands what '*that*' life could even be like?

**Voice 4:** I think she understands.... I think she has glimpsed... that life can be about impulse and passion and affinity and choice rather than about tradition and expectation.

**[Voice 1 and Voice 2 in conversation]**

**Voice 1:** And did you do it for um... when you met your husband, did you...did you fall in love with him? Was it for love... What was your, kind of, main reason?

**Voice 2:** [pause] It wasn't really for love.

[pause]

**Voice 1:** But do you think that was quite, quite common at the time?

**Voice 2:** [pause]

No, I didn't think so. It was just me.

No, I don't think it was common.

**SCENE IV**

**Voice 1:** [records a Journal Entry]

My friends are having kids and all of a sudden the voice notes they're sending me are no longer about themselves, catching up, but about their children.

And then, the voices of these new god-children that I have

are beginning to feel like little hooked question marks...

Each carrying a "Will you?"

"Won't you?"

**Voice 6:** [A voice-note of a young girl reading a bedtime story - Maurice

Sendak's *Where The Wild Things Are* ]

*"Max, Max didn't have any dinner..."*

**[Weaves into voice 1 and voice 4 in conversation]**

**Voice 4:** It jumps directly to her writing to her kids... which is “Goodbye, because I love you.” **[quotes directly from the book, reading from a letter which Edna writes to her children]**

She knows that she is not fit to be the kind of mother society expects. And...

**Voice 7: [calling from distance, kitchen rumbling sounds]** Mami, mama...

**Voice 4:** ... what society expects of her and what her children might expect of her. And therefore, And because she loves them,

She's going to just ... go.

**[Voice 1 and voice 2 in conversation about motherhood]**

**Voice 1:** And then, once you got into that role... did you feel like you were playing a role?

**Voice 2:** I was happy. I was happy in that role.

**Voice 1:** What would you say to people if they're wondering about whether to have children or not?

**[pause]**

**Voice 2:** I'd recommend it.

**SCENE V**

**Voice 6:** I had to face the fact that, um, I'm not where I want to be as a woman. I'm 30 years old and I thought I will have more confidence, maybe more self-esteem, maybe feel more feminine, simply be like a grown-up woman. And still I didn't really feel like one. And the idea of having a girl and being *the* woman in her life was, uh, scary for me

at that moment, because I felt like suddenly the time ran out and I'm not there, where I wanted to be. I'm not ready to be a real female role model for someone.

**[Weaves into to voice 1 and voice 4 in conversation]**

**Voice 4: [reflecting on the character of Edna, and what it means to be 'radical' in today's**

**world].** I think that part of the essence of 'radical' might be...

casting-off in a direction where there is no prior cartography for you to sort of rely upon.

And persisting.

**Voice 1: [recording a journal entry]** But then part of me wants to just... *not* do that.

Part of me thinks - do I only want that kind of relationship because, because I've been made to think that's the only way?

And now I'm like, oh, just should I get married? Should I not? Should I have children?

Should I not?

Who am I?

Who am I?

Who am I?

**[Weaves to voice 1 and voice 4 in conversation]**

**Voice 4:** Because, do you think Edna is radical?

**Voice 1:** I feel that maybe she's still in this very, you know, subconscious kind of state.

Like when you've just woken up and you're still in a slight dream.

I think that she's aware that she's being pulled in certain directions and that the life she had wasn't fitting her. But I'm not sure how conscious it all is...I think it's more of a current within her, that she's being kind of pulled towards...



## SCENE VI

**Voice 3 & 1 overlayed:** “It was not the first time”

**Voice 3 continues:** *“It was not the first time she had heard an artist at the piano.*

*Perhaps it was the first time she was ready. Perhaps it was the first time her being was tempered to take an impression of the abiding truth.”*

**Voice 1: [records a journal entry ]** The book is filled with these... like, bubbling, bubbling,

bubbling... And then ... it can't be.

**Voice 4:** Maybe that's what this book is about?

**Voice 1:** Frustration?

**Voice 4:** Well... maybe it's about being awakened to irresolution...

And the discomforts and aliveness that that brings.

I don't know...

It's just... **[pause]**

Because *that* is really what she's awakened to...

## SCENE VII

**Voice 1:** *"The water of the Gulf stretched out before her, gleaming with a million lights of the sun"*

**Voice 1 & Voice 3 overlayed:** *"The voice of the sea is seductive never ceasing, whispering, clamoring, murmuring, inviting the soul to wander in abysses of solitude."*

**Voice 1: [records a journal entry]**

And that's it...It's so unsatisfying in a way, But I just think...

I think this character of Edna is now living inside me

And it's, it's, it's oddly touching.

And I think that *this* is the power of a good book.

When you read something and it lights this flame, it shines a light.

And the whole book is about this.

Light shining, glimmering, gleaming, and pathways opening up - that you didn't see for yourself before.

A 'self' that you didn't ever allow yourself to be...

Suddenly it becomes more possible.

**[Recording Ends]**